

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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INFO AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL

AMEMBASSY CARACAS

C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 7683

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: OTRA EC

SUBJECT: REQUESTS BY YACHT-OWNERS TO VISIT GALAPAGOS

REF: A) STATE 239828 B) STATE 242283 C) STATE 246922

D) QUITO 7334 E) CARACAS 10889 (ALL NOTAL)

1. NAVATT, IN ACCORDANCE REF EMBTEL, HAS TAKEN TWO FURTHER OCCASIONS TO EXPLORE SUBJECT WITH RADM VASQUEZ, C-IN-C ECUADOREAN NAVY. WE HAVE BEEN LEFT IN NO DOUBT THAT IT IS FIRM CURRENT POLICY OF GOE TO APPROVE NO RPT NO APPLI-CATIONS FOR VISITS BY FOREIGN-FLAG PRIVATE YACHTS TO THE GALAPAGOS ISLANDS. ALL VISITORS TO ISLANDS MUST DO SO AS MEMBERS OF LOCALLY ORGANIZED TOURS ABOARD ECUADOREAN-FLAG VESSELS.

2. ABOVE IS AT VARIANCE WITH EXISTING GOE PROVISIONS, MINISTERIAL DECREE 059 OF FEBRUARY 7, 1973 (TRANSMITTED TO DEPARTMENT UNDER COVER EMBASSY'S A-107 OF 10 AUGUST 1973) WHICH ESTABLISHED NORMS AND PROCEDURES FOR SUCH VISITS. HOWEVER, NAVY INFORMS THAT AMENDMENT TO THIS DECREE IS PRESENTLY PERCOLATING THROUGHT GOE WHICH PROHIBITS VISITS BY FOREIGN PLEASURE CRAFT AND IT HAS ALREADY BEEN ADOPTED AS OPERATING POLICY BY NAVY.

3. WE WERE ASSURED HOWEVER THAT APPLICATIONS BY RESEARCH
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CRAFT FOR LEGITIMATE SCIENTIFIC PURPOSES WILL CONTINUE TO

BE RECEIVED SYMPATHETICALLY, WITHIN PROCEDURES ESTABLISHED BY MINISTERIAL DECREE 059.

4. RATIONALE BEHIND THIS NEW LIMITATION WAS DECLARED TO BE CONCERN WITH PRESERVATION OF ISLANDS' UNIQUE ECOLOGY, ALREADY SUFFERING FROM THE IMPACT OF PAST LEVELS OF TOURISM. NAVY C-IN-C STATES THAT PERSONNEL OF DARWIN STATION, INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE OPERATING PERMANENTLY IN GALAPAGOS, HAVE BEEN ADVANCING THESE CONCERNS TO GOE FOR SEVERAL YEARS AND THAT SAME SUBJECT HAS PROMPTED DEMARCHES FROM "SEVERAL" GOVERNMENTS, AMONG THEM THAT OF UK (WHICH IS MAJOR FINANCIAL SUPPORTER OF DARWIN STATION).

5. POSSIBILITY WAS ALSO EXPLORED WITH VASQUEZ THAT PRIVATE CRAFT MIGHT SAIL TO ISLANDS WITH PASSENGERS JOINING ORGANIZED TOUR THERE, PERHAPS WITH EVIDENCE OF FIRM RESERVATIONS BEING REQUIRED BY GOE BEFORE VISIT APPROVED. THIS HOWEVER WAS IMMEDIATELY SHOT DOWN; PROSPECTIVE YACHTSMEN-VISITORS MUST JOIN TOUR ON ECUADOREAN MAINLAND. VASQUEZ FRANKLY EXPLAINED THAT NAVY'S RESOURCES TOO THIN TO PERMIT ADEQUATE PATROLLING OF ISLANDS AND STATED BELIEF THAT ONLY WAY OF ADEQUATELY CONTROLLING VISITORS IS THROUGH LOCALLY-ORGANIZED TOUR GROUPS.

6. IT WOULD OF COURSE BE NAIVE TO IGNORE CERTAIN SELF-SERVING ELEMENTS OF GOE POSITION. OTHER THAN MINIMAL AMOUNTS FOR FUEL AND PROVISIONS, PRIVATE-YACHT VISITORS LEAVE VIRTUALLY NO MONEY IN ECUADOR AND THIS FACT IS NOT LOST ON LOCAL OFFICIALS. ALSO, PRINCIPAL OPERATOR WITH NEAR-MONOPOLY ON GALAPAGOS TOURS, LOCALLY-BASED METROPOLITAN TOURS, HAS A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOE WHICH CAN ONLY BE DESCRIBED AS NOTABLY CLOSE.

7. NEVERTHELESS, CONCERN OVER FRAGILE ECOLOGY OF GALAPAGOS IS REAL AND WELL-FOUNDED. DARWIN STATION AND ITS PERSONNEL ARE INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNIZED FOR THEIR SERIOUS APPROACH AND SCIENTIFIC ACCOMPLISHMENTS, AND THEIR PREOCCUPATIONS (WHICH ARE REAL) ARE BORNE OUT BY OBSERVATION OF NUMEROUS USG PERSONNEL STATIONED HERE WHO HAVE VISITED ISLANDS. IN SPITE OF POSSIBLE NEGATIVE FACTORS NOTED ABOVE, OFFICIAL CONCERN

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WITH ECOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS LIKEWISE APPEARS GENUINE AND IS IN MARKED CONTRAST TO INDIFFERENCE OF PREVIOUS ECUADOREAN GOVERNMENTS.

8. WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT GOING TO THE WELL AT HIGHER LEVELS STANDS ANY CHANCE OF REVERSING CURRENT GOE POLICY. WE MIGHT, AS AN EXCEPTIONAL FAVOR, BE ABLE TO SECURE PERMISSION FOR ONE OR ANOTHER YACHT TO VISIT THE GALAPAGOS. BUT DOING SO

WOULD DRAW DOWN OUR ACCOUNT HEAVILY AND WOULD LEAVE THE BASIC PROBLEM UNRESOLVED. MOREOVER, WE HAVE NO EVIDENCE THAT THE BAN IS IN ANY WAY DISCRIMINATORY. ALL FOREIGN-FLAG CRAFT SEEM EQUALLY AFFECTED. VASQUEZ TOLD NAVATT HE HAS "OVER 300" REQUESTS PENDING-PRESUMABLY ACCUMULATED OVER RECENT MONTHS-AND THAT HE INTENDS TO VETO THEM ALL.)

9. EMBASSY THEREFORE RECOMMENDS AND REQUESTS THAT DEPARTMENT INFORM ALL INQUIRERS THAT PRESENT GOE POLICY IS TO RESTRICT TOURISM TO GALAPAGOS BECAUSE OF ECOLOGICAL CONCERNS; THAT REQUESTS BY FOREIGN-FLAG PLEASURE CRAFT (AS DISTINCT FROM LEGITIMATE RESEARCH VESSELS) ARE NOT CURRENTLY BEING APPROVED; AND THAT CASUAL VISITORS TO THE GALAPAGOS ARE BEING PERMITTED ONLY AS MEMBERS OF ORGANIZED TOURS SAILING ABOARD ECUADOREAN-FLAG VESSELS.
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